

Canticles 2: 4

Notes of an Address

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Beloved Friends — I wish to give you a Motto, and I trust, if you come to see anything of the truth that it contains, you will take it as a word to be next and dearest to your heart for the coming year. It is —

"His banner over me was love."

You will find the words in Canticles 2: 4. I know no more precious portion of God's Word than the whole passage from which they are taken: —

"I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." (Cant. 2: 1.)

The rose in its beauty, the lily in all its hidden perfectness — it is Jesus; and the moment he is presented to the souls of *those who know him*, their affections are drawn out towards him by the thought of all that he has been and is to them.

This Jesus — little known or thought of by the world, is our shelter from the heat of trial, and the food of our souls, in the dearth and famine of all else that can satisfy in our desert journey of life.

"I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." (Cant. 2: 3.)

But, my friends, is it so with you? Do you know anything of Jesus? I do not ask you by what name you call yourself, nor what doctrine you hold *about* Jesus; but I ask you earnestly, and must press my question, Do you know Christ for yourself? Do you know him personally? Have you received Christ in your heart as the One whom you love above all others? Do you know him in your life as a power separating from the world and from sin?

It is sad to listen to the vague and heartless way in which many who have not peace with God, but yet who acknowledge the claims of Christ, speak of him in general terms. They speak of our Saviour, who died for *all* the world, and think thus to avoid all individual dealing with God. How different is the warm appropriation of Christ by Mary, as she says, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him!" How she speaks as if he belonged to her and none else in the world beside. "My Lord and my God," cries Thomas, as the light of a risen Saviour burst in upon his soul. None knew better than Paul *about* Christ; but far — far more blessed, he could say, "I know whom I have believed."

My brother, my sister, be warned of a religion without Jesus. Be warned of a form without power — an unreal, empty shadow; if you don't know Jesus now as "the friend that sticketh closer than a brother," you will find yourself *alone when* all other friends have failed — alone at the bar of God — alone in the bottomless abyss of hell; — in the crowd indeed — but in the crowd of those upon whom the awful *solitariness of the soul without God* has burst with tremendous reality!

But if, on the contrary, the truths *about* Jesus have brought us *to* Jesus, how blessed to know the place that he has given us before God!

Many of the Lord's dear people fail of the "fulness of joy" which is our privilege, and which it is his will we should have abidingly, (John 17: 13,) because they do not see this truth. Jesus has died for us. He has borne our sins, and borne them away for ever. He "loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." But this is not the whole truth. There is more to be told and to be enjoyed — far more than all this, wonderful as it is! This, indeed, *he has done for us*; but he has done more. He has brought us into the family of the Father. He has made us the children of God. He has given us the place of *Sonship*. This is *the place he has given us* -

"He brought me to the banqueting-house; and his banner over me was love." (Cant. 2: 4.)

The blood has not only availed to wash away my sins, so that God can say, "I will remember them no more;" but it has rent the veil that separated the people of old from the Holiest of Holies, and has brought me in with my High Priest, Jesus, even into the most holy presence of God. Nor am I there *unclothed*; for by faith in that blood, I have been brought in as Jesus himself, and stand there "the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. 5: 21.) Enveloped in that spotless robe, I take my place as no unwelcome guest at the banqueting table of love. The arms of love, from which nothing can ever separate me, enclose me in their embrace. The kiss of reconciliation and peace is upon my brow; and the blood gives me my title to it all.

Oh, beloved! if as a poor sinner you have really cast the eye of faith, though it be with a feeble glance, to Jesus, this look of faith — this renunciation of self and trust in Jesus — gives you this place before God, *whether you know it or not*. In *Christ* you have your meetness for it all. Your place in the presence of God does not depend upon any merit of your own. It does not depend on your walk down here, or upon your realization of all this blessedness, but it depends upon the value and efficacy of the blood of Jesus. May God give you to see it and enjoy it.

But, beloved, has the perfectness of my place before God given me immunity from trial, difficulty, or temptation down here? No, no. Each heart answers, No. My path down here may be one of trial. Each, one knows the character of the trial to which he has been exposed, and each knows the uncertainty of all that is to come. The coming year may be one of sickness. Health may fail; friends may fail; the happy Christmas circle now complete, may have many a gap in its ranks before another Christmas comes round. Besides all this, there are things hard to be borne — the reproach of Christ, the opposition of those dear to us who know not the Lord; the want of sympathy of those who are the Lord's, from whom we might have looked for the right hand of fellowship.

But, beloved, it is not with the path and with its roughnesses, that I want to occupy your minds. No; but I would have you think of the banner that floats above your heads. Up! weeping eyes that are turned in upon self, or fixed upon the path, or strained, amid tears, into the future, where all looks dark and gloomy — look up, and listen to the words - the precious words -

"His banner over me is love."

Thy trials and difficulties are from the hand of a Father, who deals with thee in love, as with His child. He is drawing thee nearer to Himself. Thou must nestle all the closer to the side of Jesus. *There* perplexity, or coldness, or the withering blast of disappointed hope, has no power; or if it blows at all, it serves but to float over thee the banner of love. "But the future?" you say. Well, the future — trust it to the Father. Bring Him all your care, "for he careth for you;" and leave it with Him. Have things turned out otherwise than you had looked or hoped for? Still, "his banner over you is love." And it is your place and mine to bow our heads in meek submission to the Father's will. This was Jesus' yoke, and it is ours; "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Let us take his yoke upon us, and his word is pledged to it — we shall find rest unto our souls. "His banner over me is love." What a thought to

rest upon! What a pillow on which to sleep or die!

But there are those who say, our Motto might be otherwise rendered. They say, the word "Banner" ought to be rendered "Standard." Be it so, we will follow them in the change, and see if it is not still a Motto for us. And now, we are taken from the gentler scenes of rest in a Father's house to the sterner activities of the camp, the battle-field, and the fight. The "Standard" at once summons me to the thought, and very presence, of the enemy. Need we stop to inquire — who and what he is? Nay, we *are in the fight* already. The world, the flesh, and the devil. are opposed to us in formidable array. Our conflict is with "principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world — wicked spirits in the heavenlies." We were once found on the side of those that are now opposed to us. We walked according to their course, and according to their prince. (Eph. 2: 2.) But we are deserters from them: therefore the fight is all the fiercer. We have been quickened, raised with Jesus, and seated in the heavenlies — brought into the banqueting house; and they ever seek "to cast us down from our excellency," and make us walk in the flesh. Oh, which of us has not felt the power of the enemy? But how blessed, to look up now and again, nay ever, from the scene of strife and conflict, to repose in the thought that the *Standard* over us is love!

God, in His great love wherewith He hath loved us, has given us to fight under that standard, and not all the powers of the enemy can prevail against us. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Our standard is one of victory. There is not one blot on the unsullied fame of that standard. Far and wide it has been carried over the earth, and everywhere it has prevailed. We fight, then, in no uncertain cause, for the Lord has triumphed, and in him the victory is secured to us. Look up, faint-hearted one, and see the names of the victories that love has now inscribed upon thy standard, and once more gird thy sword upon thy thigh: rally closer round the standard — for it is when we wander from it, we fall. Oftentimes we go forth in the impetuosity of self-confidence, and fall; but round that standard all is victory — "victory through the blood of the Lamb!" But then again, as the standard is borne in the fight, it suffers. I have seen one, that had never known defeat through a century of war, hanging in shreds by its pole. Oh! beloved, as we gaze upon our standard of love, we see it bathed in blood; it is pierced with the spear and the nails; it, has been in the deadliest conflict, when none of us were there to fight around it. Ah, you see it — the standard is love, and that, God's love manifested in the Cross of Jesus.

Jesus is our standard; and all this he has borne for us. He has fought for us alone. He has, in death, triumphed over death and hell. He has bruised the head of the serpent that had the power of death. He that has led captivity captive, has gone up on high; he is our standard of victory. Well may we take courage, for even in death we can cry, "O death, where is thy sting? O, grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

But there is another, and a third sense, in which, I think, we may use our Motto with effect. We speak of a standard of right and wrong; and I conceive the meaning is not altogether unassociated with that which we have been just considering. As the regiment follows its standard, never hesitating to follow where it leads, the standard becomes its guide, its rule: so we take the word in the sense of a rule of life, and then, how blessed to read, "His standard over me is love!"

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus, what has been your rule of life until today? Have you been setting before yourself some human model — even the dearest servant of God that you can find? If so, I say you have been lowering God's standard. Worse again — have you been making your own experience your rule? "I walked up to such a mark last year — I will make it a higher one next year." Or has it been your highest thought that you are under a system that consists of rules of right and wrong — of "do this, and don't do the other"? Then, no wonder you look so unhappy, and do so little. Look

for a little moment at God's standard as set before us in the light of the truth which we are considering.

And *now* we have both parts of our verse brought into connection. Love has brought me into the banqueting house; and now this, my place before God, is to be the rule of my walk down here. In other words, my *standing* is my *standard*. How influential, then, does all this truth become, if we could only live in the full realization of it! What is the place which God has given me? He has brought me into His own presence — made me *one with Christ*. Now what conduct on my part will be suitable to this position? Am I risen with Christ? Then why set my affections on things below? Is my home in heaven? Then let me walk as a pilgrim and a stranger here. Is my citizenship in heaven? Oh, then, let every word, every act, be consistent with such a dignity. Were these blessed truths made by the Holy Spirit part and parcel of ourselves, how should we be enabled, as it were, to look down from heaven to earth, and judge of things as God judges!

But this thought goes higher still: Christ is my standing before God. I am accepted in him. Then I should walk as Christ himself. Would Christ be found in such a scene of gaiety or revelry? Then surely will not I. Would he give way to such a thought? Neither can I. Would such a word be his? Then let me not utter it. Oh! how such a rule transcends all miserable questionings as to whether there is any positive command against one thing, or any harm in another. Love is a thousand times more influential than law. When the love of Christ fills the soul, there is an end to all these wretched, cold calculations of selfishness which would bargain for yielding as little to the Lord as could be withheld with an easy conscience. Oh! how different is the boundlessness of the obedience of love, that, if it had a thousand hearts, would regard them all as too little for Jesus, and that finds its supreme delight in seeking to please him in all things!

But do you say, what a high standard is this! How can I ever attain to it? Ah! beloved, here God meets us, humbled under a sense of our shortcoming and imperfection. He has given us a High Priest who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities. In all our need and weakness and difficulties, as we journey along the wilderness path to our Father's house and home, we have the precious sympathy of Jesus. He has faced the full brunt of the storm. He, having been tempted himself as the Son of Man, clothed with our nature, can succour us when we are tempted; and we have not only his sympathy, but his help. I may sympathize with you in a little; yet however I may yearn to do it, I cannot help to bear your load of care. But Jesus has not only a perfectness of sympathy, but he is all-powerful to help. Let us, therefore, beloved, "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may find grace to help in time of need."

And now, in conclusion, let us, above all things, set Jesus before us. Let us keep looking unto him as one whose banner over us is love — as our standard round which to rally in every hour of conflict, and as our rule by which to order all our ways. Following in his footsteps, lean upon his arm. Be assured of his sympathy — his help; and keep looking for the moment, when, according to his promise, he will appear to take us to himself. May the language of our hearts be, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus! come quickly!" May the Lord be with you! The Lord bless you!